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# The Days of Future Past

## Thinking about the Jewish Life to Come from within the Warsaw Ghetto

### Abstract

Jews imprisoned in the Warsaw Ghetto pondered not only how to survive the present but also the days to come. The day of liberation was calculated on the basis of rumours, interpretations of wartime developments, and Kabbalistic prophecies. In this paper, among different notions of the future expressed by the inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto, I focus especially on the perspective of Jews active in various parties and youth movements. I approach the question of what Jews thought about the future and what would lead to it within the broader context of the sociology of time. The primary source used in this paper is the Jewish underground press published in the Warsaw Ghetto.

“As usual in such times, people believe in different fortune-tellers. Ossowiecki<sup>1</sup> [...] predicted that a very important event would happen on 17 August. A Jewish woman, a fortune-teller who, according to the statements of a friend of mine, predicted the occupation of neutral states and war with Russia, now claims that in three months’ time there will be peace.”<sup>2</sup>

These predictions were recorded by Dr Emanuel Ringelblum. A historian and creator of the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archive (*Oneg Shabbat*),<sup>3</sup> in his *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* he often mentioned people looking for signs presaging the post-war era. In the imposed and ruthless reality of the Warsaw Ghetto, where between November 1940 and July 1942 nearly 500,000 people were imprisoned and about 100,000 died of hunger and disease, Jews pondered not only how to survive the present but also the days to come. The day of liberation was calculated on the basis of rumours, interpretations of wartime developments, and various Kabbalistic prophecies.<sup>4</sup> In the popular imagination, the future was to mirror the past and undo the present. However, Jewish intelligentsia and politicians challenged this approach. For example, Saul Stupnicki, a journalist, who was interviewed for *Oneg Shabbat* in 1942, commented:

“Jews will emerge from the war terribly impoverished. Whoever is deluded that when the war ends everything will be well and good, one would return

1 Stefan Ossowiecki (1877–1944) was a famous Polish psychic.

2 Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego [Archive of the Jewish Historical Institute], Archiwum Ringelbluma [Ringelblum Archive] (AZIH, ARG), I 448/5, 2, Emanuel Ringelblum, Notatki [Notes of Emanuel Ringelblum]. Entry from July–August 1941.

3 For more on Ringelblum and the archive, see: Samuel D. Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Rediscovering a Hidden Archive from the Warsaw Ghetto*, New York 2006; Aleksandra Bańkowska/Tadeusz Epsztein (ed.), *Ringelblum Archive. The Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto, Vol. 3: The People and Works of “Oneg Shabas”*, Warsaw 2020.

4 For popular jokes, proverbs, prophecies, and legends regarding the war and its end collected in the Warsaw Ghetto by Rabbi Shimon Huberband, see: J. S. Gurock/R.S. Hirt (eds.), *Kiddush Hashem. Jewish Religious and Cultural life in Poland during the Holocaust*, New York 1987, 113–131, here 121–125.

to one's old, pre-war occupation, or job makes a big mistake. The businesses taken away from Jews outside the Ghetto, the factories, buildings, workshops, flats, will never be returned to their onetime Jewish owners. Even if the government installed after the war will be the most liberal.

There must be a general turnover. I don't believe in a mass-emigration of millions. For the plain reason that there won't be [enough] money [...]. So there will have to be some way of finding an accommodation here on the spot, in Europe, by way of change of stratification. There will be possibilities in that great process of rebuilding and reconstruction after the war, but one must be prepared for a hard, difficult life.<sup>5</sup>

Stupnicki touched upon issues of great importance to all Jewish politicians and activists imprisoned in the Warsaw Ghetto who questioned and tried to define the future. When would the future begin? How would it start? Who would bring freedom? Would Jews finally possess a meaningful political power? The heterogeneity of the pre-war Jewish population was naturally reflected in the Warsaw Ghetto, which became a place of intense discussion regarding visions of a new Jewry. Topics varied from the desired social structure, the language Jews should speak, the professions that the post-war generation should pursue, to the education and expectations of the youth.

The platform for these debates was the underground press, which serves as a key source for this analysis. In the article, I will discuss briefly the history and scope of the Warsaw Ghetto underground press. I will contextualise political narrations of the future within a wider social science framework shaped by François Hartog's theory on historicity and Barbara Adam's theory on colonising time. In order to recreate the factors that shaped Jewish thinking about the future, I will explain the context and role of Jewish politics before the war. In the next part, I will present reactions to the war and emphasise the notion of 'belonging' outside the ghetto in terms of geography and mentality as shown in the underground press. Finally, I will focus on the psychological meaning of the dreamt-of future and the role of youth in fulfilling it. My analysis ends before 22 July 1942, the day that marked the beginning of the Great Deportation, when within three months the Germans deported about 300,000 Jews from the ghetto to the Treblinka death camp, where they were killed. It seems that with the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto, people erased all hope for the future in its previous forms.

The earliest issue of the Jewish underground press – the Yiddish *Biuletin* (Bulletin) of the Bund – appeared in May 1940. The possibilities for editing and printing underground Jewish newspapers under German occupation were nowhere near those of the pre-war period. Despite these limitations, the editors aimed to influence the daily life of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, shape their worldview, help overcome frustration and despair, and spread belief in a better future.<sup>6</sup> Today, it is difficult to

5 Answers to a Questionnaire by Sz. Stupnicki, in: Josef Kermish (ed.), *To Live with Honor and Die with Honor. Selected Documents from the Warsaw Ghetto Underground Archives "Oneg Shabbath"*, Jerusalem 1986, 739.

6 The Jewish underground did not have a professional printing house. Newspapers were usually copied on a duplicator, sometimes typed on carbon paper. The frequency varied depending on access to paper, with the newspapers appearing as monthly issues, biweekly magazines, and occasional prints. For more on the press, see: Ewa Koźmińska-Frejłak, *Żydowska prasa konspiracyjna. Rekonesans badawczy* [The Jewish Underground Press. Introductory Notes], in: Joanna Nalewajko-Kulikov (ed.), *Studia z dziejów trójjęzycznej prasy żydowskiej na ziemiach polskich (XIX–XX w.)* [Studies on the History of the Trilingual Jewish Press in Polish Territory (nineteenth and twentieth centuries)], Warsaw 2012, 181–209; Barbara Engelking/Jacek Leociak, *Warsaw Ghetto. A Guide to a Perished City*, New Haven 2009, 685–692, here 687; Marian Fuks, *Z dziejów wielkiej katastrofy narodu żydowskiego* [From the History of the Great Catastrophe of the Jewish Nation], Poznań 1999, 186. On the role of the underground press, see: Israel Gutman, *Resistance. The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, Boston/New York 1994, 128–130. A full seven-volume scholarly edition of the Warsaw Ghetto underground press has been

determine the full extent of press publications in the ghetto, but we know from Ringelblum's notes that publishing became an arena of competition between parties and youth organisations.<sup>7</sup> According to various estimates, approximately seventy press titles were in circulation in the ghetto: forty in Yiddish, thirty in Polish, and ten in Hebrew.<sup>8</sup>

In keeping with the rules of the underground, newspapers did not provide information regarding their editorial boards. Articles were signed using codenames or left unsigned so that the authorship, which was obvious to wartime readers, is hard to determine today. During the publishing process, the roles of chief editor, proof-reader, and author shifted according to the circumstances and needs. Among the individuals engaged in the underground press were the most engaged members of youth movements, including Yitzhak Zuckerman, Mordechai Tenenbaum, Tuvia Borzykowski, and Marek Folman from Dror,<sup>9</sup> Samuel Breslaw and Mordechai Anielewicz from Hashomer Hatsair,<sup>10</sup> and Eliezer Geller and Natan Eck from Gordonia.<sup>11</sup> No names from Betar, a Zionist Revisionist organisation, are known.<sup>12</sup> Hersz Berliński, Sachno Sagan, and Izrael Lichtenstein represented the core of the publishing team of the Po'ale Tsiyon-Left party.<sup>13</sup> Newspapers of the Po'ale Tsiyon-Right were published by Szamaj Laufer and Meir Meierowicz.<sup>14</sup> The Bund's underground publications included contributions by prominent pre-war activists such as Bernard Goldstein, Abrasza Blum, Mauryc Orzech, and Berek Sznajdmil, but they also relied on young members such as Marek Edelman, who was responsible for the publishing process, the underground printing house, and distribution.<sup>15</sup>

published by the Jewish Historical Institute as part of a Ringelblum Archive series. For more details on underground newspapers and their editors, see also: Tuvia Borzykowski, *Between Tumbling Walls*, Lohame Ha-Getaot, 1976; Marek Edelman/Martyna Rusiniak-Karwta (ed.), *Nieznane zapiski o getcie warszawskim* [Unknowns Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto], Warsaw 2017; Havka Folman Raban, *They Are Still with Me*, Lohame Ha-Getaot, 2001; Bernard Goldstein, *Five Years in the Warsaw Ghetto*, New York 1961.

7 AŻIH, ARG I 445/7 (Ring. I/506), 2, Notes of Emanuel Ringelblum. Entry from 12 May 1942.

8 Joseph Kermish provided different numbers based on the issues he had access to. He listed fifty titles in total, of which 29 were published in Yiddish, 19 in Polish, one in Hebrew, and three in mixed languages. Joseph Kermish, *On the Underground Press in Warsaw Ghetto*, in: *Yad Vashem Studies on the European Jewish Catastrophe and Resistance*, Vol. 1, Jerusalem 1957, 85-124.

9 The titles of the newspapers published in Yiddish were *Dror* (Freedom), *Yedies* (News), and *Inerleche Korespondenc* (Inner Correspondence). Only one title appeared in Polish: *Dror-Wolność* (Dror-Freedom). On the scope and content of the Dror underground press, see: Piotr Laskowski/Sebastian Matuszewski (ed.), *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy* [Ringelblum Archive. The Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto], Vol. 19: *Prasa getta warszawskiego. Hechaluc-Dror i Gordonia* [The Warsaw Ghetto Underground Press. Hechalutz-Dror and Gordonia], Warsaw 2015, xiii-xx, 505-508.

10 The Yiddish titles included: *Iton Hatnua* (Newspaper of the Movement) and *Neged Hazerem* (Against the Current) as well as *El-Al* (Ascending) and *Der Oyfbroyz* (The Upheaval). On offer for Polish-language readers were *Jutrznia* (Before Dawn), *Przedwiośnie* (Early Spring), *Zarzew* (Embers), and *Plomienie* (Flame).

11 They published the Polish-language *Słowo Młodych* (Word of the Youth. Newspaper of the Gordonist Youth) and the Yiddish-language *Oysdoyer* (Endurance). On the scope and content of Gordonia underground press, see: Laskowski/Matuszewski (ed.), *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, Vol. 19, xx-xxiii, 505-508.

12 *Magen Dawid* (Star of David) and *Hamedinat* (The State), which were published in Hebrew and trilingually in Hebrew, Polish, and Yiddish respectively.

13 In Yiddish, the Bund published *Yugnt-Ruf* (Call to the Young), *Proletairishe gedank* (Proletarian Thought), and *Avangarda* (Vanguard), and in Polish *Nasze Hasła* (Our Mottos) and *Awangarda Młodzieży. Pismo Żydowskiej Młodzieży Socjalistycznej* (Vanguard of Youth. A Publication of the Jewish Marxist Youth). For a content summary of the Po'ale Tsiyon-Left underground press, see: Eleonora Bergman/Tadeusz Epsztajn/Maciej Wójcik (ed.), *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy* [Ringelblum Archive. The Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto], Vol. 17: *Prasa getta warszawskiego. Poalej Syjon Lewica i Poalej Syjon Prawica* [The Press of the Warsaw Ghetto. Po'ale Tsiyon-Left and Po'ale Tsiyon-Right], Warsaw 2016, xi-xv.

14 These were *Befrayung* (Liberation), *Unzer weg* (Our Path), and in Polish *Nowe Tory* (New Tracks). For a content summary of the Po'ale Tsiyon-Right underground press, see: Bergman/Epsztajn/Wójcik (ed.), *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, Vol. 17, xv-xvi.

15 They published *Biuletin* (Bulletin), *Tsayt-fragn* (Contemporary Issues), *Yugnt Shtime* (Voice of the Young), *Yugne Gwardie* (Young Guard), *Der Weker. Informatsie Biuletin* (The Alarm. Information Bulletin), and in Pol-

Jews involved in the underground press represented Jewish intellectual microcosms. A passion for politics brought together people of various backgrounds, opinions, ages, and experiences. The underground press informed readers not only about the war situation and global politics, but also about underground activities, the situation in occupied Poland, the destruction of local Jewish communities, the attitude of Poles towards Jews, the hardships of forced labour, and recent German crimes. News items were punctuated with essays, literary pieces, and reportages. The press was also a platform for political controversies regarding ideological issues, interpretations of the Soviet Union's passive position, and the meaning of war for the Jewish future, to list just a few. Since the autumn of 1941, press coverage limited other topics in order to report on the mass executions of Jews in the eastern Polish territories, first occupied by the Soviets, then by the Germans. After April 1942, when the Germans used the publication of illegal newspapers as a pretext to kill 52 inhabitants of the Warsaw Ghetto, the scale of underground press publications rapidly declined. The so-called Great Deportation that started in July 1942 almost put a stop to all publishing activity. The press released during and after the liquidation of the ghetto dealt almost entirely with warning calls, exposing the true aim of the deportations.<sup>16</sup>

### Time and Future as Analytical Categories

The meanings assigned to time by Jews imprisoned in ghettos and camps, through both individual and collective experience, have already been the subject of scholarly inquiry. Some scholars provided more general guidelines on how to understand the phenomenon of time in Jewish culture, while others analysed the very experience of time.

The historian David Engel postulated that Holocaust research includes the Jewish perception of time. In the traditional Jewish perspective, the past was always a point of reference: Current persecutions were placed into the context of a long history of oppression in order to find analogies as well as consolation and solutions.<sup>17</sup> This view was also shared by Alan Rosen, who reminded us that religious Jews from Central and Eastern Europe functioned at two times simultaneously: universal time, determined by the Gregorian calendar, and intimate time, connected with religious and family life and determined by the Jewish calendar.<sup>18</sup> The flow of family, social, and religious life was organized according to weekly Sabbath celebrations, monthly moon movements, and holidays. Pious Jews had a strong need to control time not only because of religious responsibilities, but also to maintain mental stability and a sense of being rooted in what was familiar to them.

ish *Trybuna Młodych* (Tribune of the Young) and *Za Naszą i Waszą Wolność* (For Our and Your Freedom). For a summary of the Bundist press, its editors, and its readers, see: Martyna Rusiniak-Karwat/Alicja Jarkowska-Natkaniec (ed.), *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy* [Ringelblum Archive. The Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto], Vol. 16: *Prasa getta warszawskiego. Bund i Cukunft* [Warsaw Ghetto Underground Press. Bund and Cukunft], Warsaw 2016, xxii-xxviii.

16 Zelman Frydrych (1911–1943) of the Bund was sent on a mission to follow one of the trains and to check what happened to the deportees. He managed to reach Sokołów Podlaski, where he learned from locals that the final destination of the train was a death camp in the village of Treblinka, located about 31 kilometres away. Based on his account, the Bund published an article entitled “The Jews of Warsaw Are Being Killed in Treblinka”, in: *Ojciec i Wacha* [On Guard], 20 September 1942, 2–4.

17 David Engel, *Resisting in Jewish Time*, in: David Engel/Yitzhak Mais/Eva Fogelman (ed.), *Daring to Resist. Jewish defiance in the Holocaust*, New York 2007, 14–15.

18 Alan Rosen, *The Holocaust's Jewish Calendars. Keeping the Sacred, Making Time Holy*, Bloomington 2019, 5, 9.

The Polish sociologists Barbara Engelking and Maria Ferenc analysed the very meaning of time. In her research focussed on individuals, Engelking claimed that during the war, time became deformed: The future was suspended, the present became ubiquitous, and the past seemed irretrievably lost due to its inadequacy; it created a cognitive burden as what Jews knew about the functioning of the world had become invalid in the world created by the Germans. Engelking compared time in the ghetto to a swamp that inexorably, albeit gradually, and thus almost imperceptibly sucked Jews into the depths of suffering.<sup>19</sup> Maria Ferenc answered Engel's postulates in her research on the attitude of Jews from the ghettos across occupied Poland, who looked for patterns, signposts, and historical parallels that would allow them to predict their own future.<sup>20</sup>

My research originates in yet another approach. In this paper, I consider the future not as individual plans for the time to come, but in a broader sense that refers to the social and political order. I use two analytic frameworks from historical and sociological concepts of time. The French historian François Hartog, for instance, has rightly argued that the terms 'past', 'present', and 'future' have been given a different significance and role depending on the period of history, which he calls the "regime of historicity". Hartog located the interwar years in the regime of historicity that spread out between the French Revolution and the 1980s. Hartog encapsulated this period – which was rich in world-changing events – into one regime on the basis of his concept of joint time experience. People widely shared the conviction that the world stood at the edge of a great catastrophe. The idea that the history of the world is ruled by some objective laws leading to the evolution (progress) of civilisation was replaced with the faith that the unjust order of the world could be overturned and the masses would be rewarded for their suffering, but only if they become its agents, the driving force of historical change. People anticipated a revolution that would induce the world to rebuild from scratch on a national or class foundation. Therefore, they directed their actions towards the future.<sup>21</sup> Hartog also emphasised the conscious understanding of time in all its dimensions. The past, understood as history, encapsulates forecasts of the future directed at the present. Yet the relation goes both ways, as Hartog wrote that the future is a light that illuminates the past.<sup>22</sup>

The second concept that is helpful in interpreting the meaning of the future in the Warsaw Ghetto was introduced by Barbara Adam, a British sociologist of the phenomenon of time who wrote about "colonising the future". The basic principle behind this theory is that the future can be determined on the basis of knowledge of the present. Since in the second half of the nineteenth century, the possession of watches became ever more common, it became possible to precisely measure time and synchronise various activities. Timeliness and planning became more accurate and timetables, schedules, and production plans were introduced to enterprises and factories. As it was possible to direct and control events and processes in the present, people believed that it was also possible to predict events in the future. Therefore,

19 Barbara Engelking, "Czas przestał dla mnie istnieć". Analiza doświadczenia czasu w sytuacji ostatecznej ["Time Ceased to Exist for Me". Analysis of Experiencing Time in Extreme Situations], Warsaw 1996, 37.

20 Maria Ferenc Piotrowska, "Czarna, ogromna chmura wisi nad nami i na pewno spadnie ...". Żydzi w miastach i miasteczkach Generalnego Gubernatorstwa wobec wiadomości o akcji 'Reinhardt' ["A Dark Enormous Cloud is Hanging Over Us and It Is Bound To Fall ...". The Reaction of Jews in Large and Small Towns In the General Government to News about 'Operation Reinhardt'], in: *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały* [Holocaust Studies and Materials] 13 (2017), 323-324.

21 François Hartog, *The Modern Régime of Historicity in the Face of Two World Wars*, in: Chris Lorenz/Berber Bevernage (ed.), *Breaking up Time. Negotiating between Present, Past and Future*, Göttingen 2013, 124-126.

22 Hartog, *The Modern Régime of Historicity*, 124.

technological and intellectual mastery of the present became a way to colonise the future. The 'colonisers' saw the future as an effect of knowledge and social potential, or the contrary result of ignorance, inaccuracy, and negligence, but never as the result of supernatural forces.<sup>23</sup> Both these theories allow for narratives of Jewish politics and the people engaged therein to be located within the wider context of the social dynamics of interwar and wartime Europe.

### Anticipating the Future

Nationalist and racist discrimination as well as the general crisis of the family and the economic struggles that marked the interwar period resulted in an increased role of politics in society. The so-called 'masses' engaged in politics in the belief that it could influence their lives for the better. The workers' movements – the Bund in particular – gained in popularity as they managed to identify various social problems as well as to acknowledge a general sense of dissatisfaction and underappreciation among Jewish workers.<sup>24</sup> As the historian Kamil Kijek wrote – who examined the consciousness and the cultural, as well as political socialisation of Jewish youths in interwar Poland – membership in a political organisation at the time was natural, whatever the particular motivation or explanation might have been.<sup>25</sup>

For Jewish politicians and activists, the interwar period in Poland became a time of searching for the "idea of freedom"<sup>26</sup> prompted by questions asked for the first time at the end of the nineteenth century, which still remained unanswered. Which path would best serve the Jews: democracy, communism, socialism, or religious orthodoxy? Which language should become the national language: Yiddish, Hebrew, or Polish? Should Jews seek independent statehood in Palestine or stay in Poland? Which worldview should they choose: religious or secular? What type of society would they want to live in: one based on nationality or class?<sup>27</sup> The bright new future meant different things to different groups. Although the assimilation of Jews was still taking place, by the 1930s acculturation had lost its popularity. For Zionism (in all its colours), it was a time of taking political and practical action to create a Jewish state in Palestine, while the Bund demanded equal rights and cultural autonomy in all countries of Jewish residence.

The long-awaited change was directly linked to the outbreak of a revolution leading to a fundamental reshaping of the world. However, when the war broke out, its form and intensity led to bitter disappointment. In an article written by Yitzhak Zuckerman to commemorate the 23<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the founding of Hechaluts, a

23 Barbara Adam, *Towards a New Sociology of the Future*, 2006. Working paper in relation to the ESRC project "In Pursuit of the Future", <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.198.2175&rep=rep1&type=pdf> (11 August 2020); Barbara Adam, *Time and Social Theory*, Philadelphia 1990; Mikołaj Lewicki, *Przyszłość nie może się zacząć. Polski dyskurs transformacyjny w perspektywie teorii modernizacji i teorii czasu* [The Future Cannot Begin. Polish Transformational Discourse in the Perspective of the Theory of Modernisation and the Theory of Time], Warsaw 2018, 153.

24 Gertruda Pickham, *Pod prąd. Powszechny Żydowski Związek Robotniczy Bund w Polsce w latach 1918–1939* [Against the Current. The General Jewish Labour Bund in Poland 1918–1939], Warsaw 2017, 37.

25 Kamil Kijek, *Dzieci modernizmu. Świadomość, kultura i socjalizacja polityczna młodzieży żydowskiej w II Rzeczypospolitej* [Children of Modernism. The Consciousness, Culture, and Political Socialisation of Jewish Youths in the Second Polish Republic], Wrocław 2017, 43, 290–292.

26 The expression "idea of freedom" comes from a book by Viktor Alter (1890–1943), a prominent Bundist leader: Viktor Alter, *Człowiek w społeczeństwie* [The Human Being in Society], Warsaw 1938, 8–15.

27 Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars*, Bloomington 1983, 32–36, 43–63.



Zionist pioneer movement,<sup>28</sup> he reflected on war as “not a natural product of time”. It did not bring about the kind of change that Jews had anticipated. On the contrary, war did not only halt the grand socioeconomic changes and national processes that Jewish society had started to implement; even worse, it reversed all the hard work that had gone into these.<sup>29</sup>

### The Present: War, Occupation, and the Ghetto

The outbreak of war confounded Jewish parties and youth movements. For personal safety, prominent leaders withdrew to the eastern cities of Poland like Vilna in order to continue their activities.<sup>30</sup> The Soviet occupation, which started on 17 September 1939, even raised doubts about the ability of parties and youth movements to outlast the new conditions.<sup>31</sup> In the Soviet zone of occupation, Jewish organisations were at risk of liquidation or absorption as Jews were expected to acculturate, while back in German-occupied Poland all Jewish parties had to go underground and were led by a new generation of passionate yet inexperienced leaders.<sup>32</sup>

At the turn of 1939 and 1940, the activists began to return to occupied Warsaw. Among them were young Zionist activists such as Zivia Lubetkin, Frumka Plotnicka, and Yitzhak Zuckerman from Dror; Mordechai Anielewicz, Tosia Altman, and Josef Kaplan from Hashomer Hatsair; and Israel Zecler from Gordonia. They joined politicians representing the older generation, who were more experienced in conducting underground activities: Menachem Kirszenbaum from the General Zionists; Maurycy Orzech from the Bund; Szachno Sagan from Po'ale Tsiyon-Left; Josef Sak from Po'ale Tsiyon-Right; Aleksander Zysze Frydman from Agudat Yisrael; and Dawid Wdowiński from the Revisionist Zionists, to name but a few. The underground activities undertaken by the various parties and youth movements have already been widely discussed in the literature, therefore I only note here that their focus lay in the sphere of culture, education, and self-help.<sup>33</sup>

The outbreak of the Second World War, apart from the devastation it wrought upon peoples' lives and work, the pauperisation, humiliation, and the threat of forced labour camps and imprisonment in the ghetto, had yet another dimension: international politics. First of all, for leaders of leftist organisations, war was regarded as an

28 Hechaluts was a Zionist pioneer movement. Pioneers shared the belief that no political or propaganda accomplishment would benefit Zionism in the long run if it was not accompanied by deeds of personal fulfilment, which became a primary objective in the organisation's overall ideology. See: Haluts, He-, in: YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, [https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Haluts\\_He-](https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Haluts_He-) (11 August 2020).

29 [Yitzhak Zuckerman] Jefim, In dem 23-tn jubil-jor fun dem He-Haluc [In the 23<sup>rd</sup> Jubilee Year of Hechaluts], in: Dror 7-8/13 (May–June 1941), 3, 7. All issues of Jewish underground newspapers that I cite in this article are part of the Ringelblum Archive stored at the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

30 This was also the result of a call made by Col. Roman Umiastowski, who on 6 September 1939 ordered all men not yet mobilised to leave Warsaw and to go to the east, where they were to create a new line of defence.

31 Zivia Lubetkin, *Zagłada i powstanie* [Destruction and Revolt], Warsaw 1999, 17. English edition: *In the Days of Destruction and Revolt*, Tel Aviv 1981.

32 This issue is widely discussed in Ruth Braude, Changes in the Ideological and Political Positions of Ha-Shomer Ha-Tsair in the Warsaw Ghetto, in: *Moreshet. Journal for the Study of the Holocaust and Anti-Semitism* 6 (2009), 7-29; see also the introduction to the Polish edition of the Hashomer Hatsair underground press: Maria Ferenc/Ewa Koźmińska-Frejlik/Piotr Laskowski (ed.), *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawskiego* [Ringelblum Archive. The Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto], Vol. 18: *Prasa getta warszawskiego. Haszomer Hacair* [The Underground Press of the Warsaw Ghetto. Hashomer Hatsair], Warsaw 2020 (forthcoming). The case of Hashomer Hatsair can be treated as a *pars pro toto* for the rise of new leaders in the Warsaw Ghetto.

33 Engelking/Leociak, *The Warsaw Ghetto*, 657-694; Yitzhak Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory. A Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/Oxford 1993, 37-134; Gutman, *Resistance*, 120-132.

imperialistic conflict, which therefore raised the question of whether the working class should participate in it, as both sides of the conflict had no intention of fulfilling political goals of the Jewish left.<sup>34</sup> Was remaining politically neutral even an option? What might come as a surprise today is that picking sides was not so obvious for some Jewish activists.



The slogan “Fascism must be crushed” on the cover of *Yugt Shtime* (Voice of the Young) from January/February 1941, published by Tsukunft, a Bundist youth movement. (AŻIH, ARG I 1310)

Courtesy of Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw.

## The Western, Eastern, and the Third Front

For Po'ale Tsiyon-Left as well as Hashomer Hatsair, support for the United Kingdom was a position they would never consider. The UK, having granted a Mandate over Palestine in 1920, was perceived as a major obstacle in creating a Jewish state. On the other hand, the Zionist Dror and Gordonia movements, together with the socialist Bund party, which saw the British working class as a part of the interna-

34 Der welt-gerangl un di ofgabn fun arbeter-klas [World Struggles and the Tasks of the Working Class], in: *Yugt-Ruf* [Call to the Young] 1 (1 January 1941), 2-5; Trzy drogi [Three Options], in: *Iton Hathun* [Newspaper of the Movement], 14-16.



tional proletariat, supported the UK.<sup>35</sup> Gordonia in particular regarded the UK as a partner, not an opponent.<sup>36</sup> Drawing conclusions from the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles, they trusted in the power of political negotiations that had begun long before the start of the Second World War to eventually lead to the establishment of a Jewish state or of Jewish autonomy in Poland.

Another far more complicated question that Jewish parties had to face was the attitude to be taken towards the Soviet Union. Prior to the war, Po'ale Tsiyon-Left and Hashomer Hatsair had been in favour of the Soviet Union. After the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), the Soviet Union was seen as a strong state of the working class, the only country interested in defeating fascism, in contrast to the imperialistic UK and France, which did not participate in the Spanish Civil War. Furthermore, both Jewish organisations stood by the position that the future Jewish state needed to have political ties to the Soviet Union.<sup>37</sup> When the USSR invaded Poland and occupied its eastern territory as well as the Baltic states, all parties and movements had to reconsider the situation. Hashomer Hatsair in particular was preoccupied with providing justification for the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of non-aggression signed just prior to the outbreak of war.<sup>38</sup>

Other Zionist movements were not so eager to trust the Soviet Union. Jewish activists who found themselves under Soviet occupation immediately understood the danger they were in, as the USSR regarded Zionism as a form of nationalism and expected Jews to acculturate. Akiba, which distinguished itself from other Zionist youth movements by embracing Judaism as the Jewish national tradition, was severely critical of socialism. Marxism, according to Akiba's ideologues, was not the answer to the persecution of the Jews as they were being persecuted not as a social class, but as a nation.<sup>39</sup> Gordonia was the biggest opponent of cooperation with the Soviet Union as it condemned the methods of class terror that followed the October Revolution of 1917. It also disagreed with the general interpretation of the war as merely an imperialistic conflict. On the other hand, such a view was held by Dror, which claimed that the fulfilment of socialist ideas did not depend on which imperialism, British or German, would win the war.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, Dror – fully aware of the Soviet Union's strength and effectiveness in enforcing its goals – had limited trust of Stalin. However, as the situation for Jews had drastically worsened with each month of the German occupation, joining the war on the side of the USSR was highly anticipated as it seemed that the Red Army was the only possible rescuer. This hope was nevertheless accompanied by the fear that liberation by the Soviet Union might mean the end of the dream of a Jewish state in Palestine.<sup>41</sup>

Tensions between the longing to participate in the war as a political party and a feeling of being deprived of agency opened the way for the idea of a Third Front. On the first page of *Yedies* (News) in June 1942, Dror published a manifesto of the Third

35 The attitude of the working masses, in: *Biuletyn* 1 (May 1940). The ARG collection does not contain the first issue of the Bund's *Biuletyn*. I therefore provide the information cited in Rusiniak-Karwat/Jarowska-Natkaniec (ed.), *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, Vol. 16, 2-3.

36 Piotr Laskowski/Sebastian Matuszewski (ed.), *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, Vol. 19, xxxviii.

37 Ku świetlanej przyszłości [Towards a Bright Future], in: *Nasze Hasła* [Our Mottos] 1 [?] (1 January 1941), 4-6.

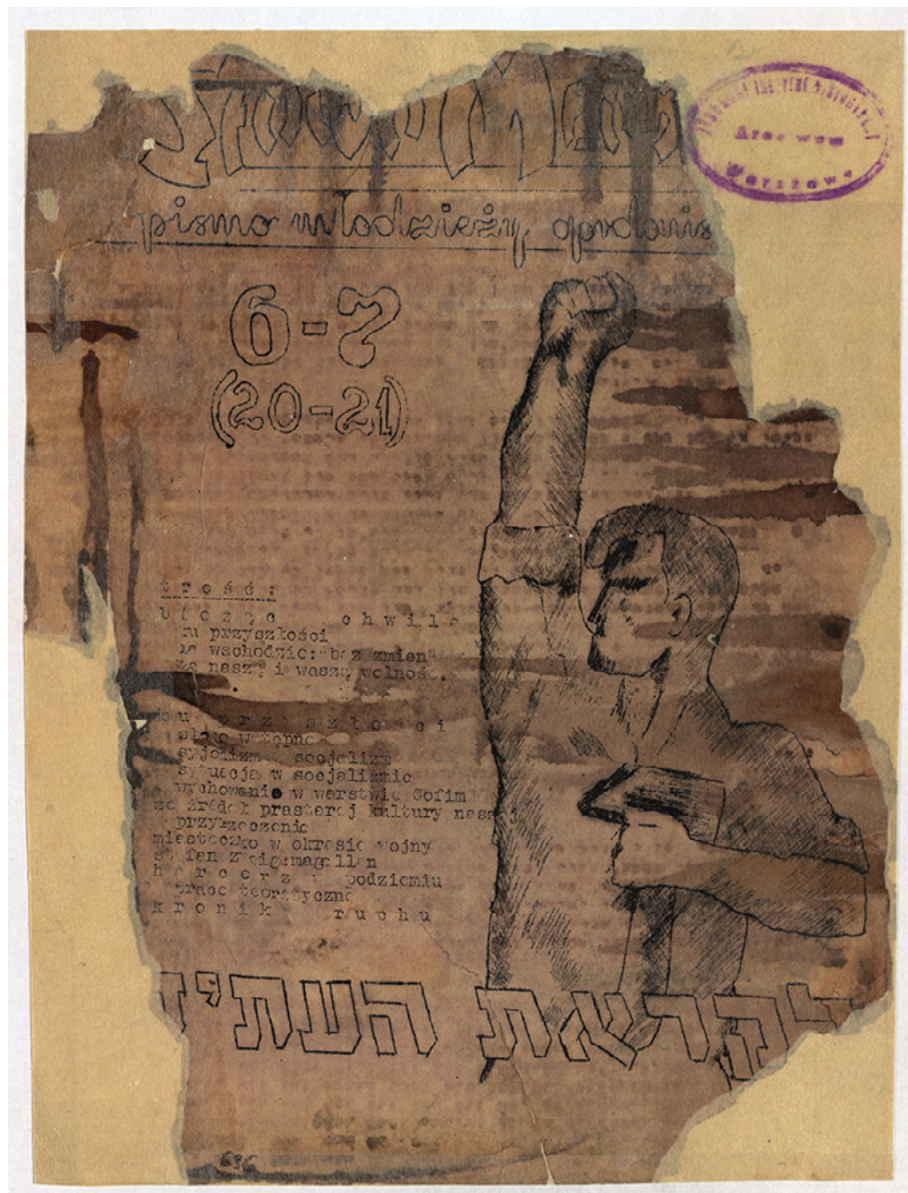
38 For a polemic between Gordonia and Hashomer Hatsair, see: *Na tropach zbankrutowanej frazeologii* [On the Trail of a Bankrupt Phraseology], in: *Słowo Młodych* 8/22 (November 1941), 10-15; Braude, *Changes in the Ideological and Political Positions*, 14.

39 Ferec Piotrowska/Koźmińska-Frejłak/Laskowski (ed.), *Archiwum Ringelbluma*, Vol. 18. There is no information about whether Akiba published any underground press in the Warsaw Ghetto.

40 [Tuvie Borzykowski] T. Domski, *In tog fun heszbn hanefesz* [On the Day of Examination of Conscience], in: *Dror* 6 (1 May 1941), 3.

41 Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory*, 83.

Front, a guerrilla army created by working-class people, extending from Narvik to the Pyrenees, from the Main River to Kharkov, who believed in socialist ideas. They were to be united by their experience of struggle against enslavement by home-grown or foreign fascism, hunger, and injustice. The author described them as people yearning for freedom while imprisoned in the great world Bastille. The ranks of the Third Front would be filled with dissatisfied people who clenched their fists and turned their desires into deeds. The manifesto claimed that the Third Front would determine the future of Europe. Under the leadership of the revolutionary proletariat, it would lead the final battle for a soon-to-be socialist Europe.<sup>42</sup>



A portrait of a young Shomer who lifts his right hand up in a fist and carries a hammer in his left hand on the front cover of *Słowo Młodych* (Word of the Youth), 6-7 (20-21) issue of the Gordonia underground newspaper.

(AŻIH, ARG I 1333)

Courtesy of Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw.

42 Der dritter front [The Third Front], in: *Yedies* 5 (June 1942), 1.

## Between Two Worlds

The occupation was a source of anxiety and psychological breakdown. It brought on a profound devastation of life on both a social and personal level. Yet, as Israel Gutman said, reflecting on his membership in Hashomer Hatsair in the Warsaw Ghetto: "During these two years, we still led a normal life, we were thinking in social terms and constantly felt as part of another world. That gave us strength".<sup>43</sup>

Belonging to the 'other world' was understood among politically involved Jews as fidelity to pre-war ideals and milieus and was a common feature among activists in the Warsaw Ghetto. In the case of the Bund, it was the ideology of *doikayt* (hereness), a strong sense of the right to Jewish autonomy in Poland and involvement in the global workers' movement. At its core, the Bund declared itself a party of the Jewish proletariat and supported the Yiddish language and culture but put class affiliation above nationality. During the war, Bundists continued to be a part of a bigger underground movement: They cooperated with Polish socialists, had access to substantial funds, and from 1942 had a representative in the National Council of the Polish government-in-exile (Shmul Zygielbojm).<sup>44</sup> Until the start of mass executions by the *Einsatzgruppen*, the editors of the Bund's underground press stressed that Jews were just one of many nations that suffered during the war. The unification of the working-class experience across all of occupied Europe aimed at remaining a part of a world other than the ghetto that the Germans had imposed on the Jews.

In the case of Zionist organisations, the 'other world' was located in Palestine among the companions who were already there, building a Jewish future. The Zionists were looking for routes to Palestine and organised new farms, where members could gain skills in agriculture.<sup>45</sup> The pre-war rejection of the *galut*, or exile, namely the philosophical and political concept that living in the diaspora, apart from nature and labour, was a source of the individual and collective spiritual desolation of the Jews, was fostered even more actively. One Gordonia author, probably Natan Eck, wrote that in the ghetto Jews experienced *galut* in its most condensed form.<sup>46</sup>

The act of juxtaposing the real world of the Warsaw Ghetto with the world of ideas was cherished and also served as a source of self-reflection. It was particularly pronounced in an article entitled "What We Are Preparing For" published by Dror in September/October 1940. The author, probably Yitzhak Zuckerman, wrote that if Dror members were to pause their conversations and look out of the window onto the street, filled with misery, grief, and fear, they might realise that the topic of their heated discussions was quite trivial. But was this really the case, the author asked? Would today's debate, where visions of the future were outlined, have any significance for this terrifying life outside? Or maybe, wondered the author, to escape into the world of politics was a sign of weakness. With his immediate answer: "It is no weakness",<sup>47</sup> Zuckerman positioned himself within the tendency that thinking about the future, planning, postponing, and anticipating events were all manifestations of rationality.<sup>48</sup>

43 Barbara Engelking/Israel Gutman, Z profesorem Israelem Gutmanem rozmawia Barbara Engelking [Professor Israel Gutman in Conversation with Barbara Engelking], in: *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i materiały* 9 (2013), 212, 215.

44 Gutman, *Resistance*, 131, 171.

45 Lubetkin, *Zagłada i Powstanie*, 35.

46 Próby dziejowe [Historical Issues], in: *Z problematyki ruchu w chwili obecnej* [On the Movements' Issues at the Present Moment], March 1942, 11-14.

47 [Yitzhak Zuckerman] J. Fim, *Cu wos mir grejtn zich?* (Fun di rejd afn chinum) [What Are We Preparing For? (From a Speech at a Conference)], in: *Dror* 4 (September/October 1940), 5.

48 Lewicki, *Przyszłość nie może się zacząć*, 161.





The front cover of the third issue of Iton Hatnua (Newspaper of the Movement), published by Hashomer Hatsair in March/April 1942. The illustration depicts a watchtower visible through a breach in the ghetto wall, which is covered in broken barbed wire. The inscriptions in Hebrew read "Towards Kibbutz Artzi" on top and "Movement in the Ghetto" on the bottom. (AŻIH, ARG I 1307)

Courtesy of Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw.

## The Future: Post-War Palestine and Post-War Poland

The 'future' was supposed to start at the end of the war. None of the publications considered the possibility of a Nazi German victory, as that would spell catastrophe for the Jewish nation and the complete eradication of Jewish culture.<sup>49</sup> In general, it can be said that wartime visions of the future were not so different from those of the pre-war period. Organisations started to cooperate closely with each other and some postulates had to be modified or adjusted to fit the new circumstances. Nevertheless, the new leaders managed to maintain their ideological integrity. The difference between the visions of the future lay not in their contents but in the probability of their realisation.

<sup>49</sup> Savetn farband und milchome [The Soviet Union and the War], in: Yugnt Shtime 2 (October 1940), 5.

The Jewish underground press portrayed the war as a historical moment that would change the world.<sup>50</sup> Obviously, it was not the revolution they had all expected, but the editors were convinced that at some point it would be possible to transform the devastating effects of the war for the benefit of the Jews and all nations. Therefore, war was not only an unprecedented cruelty and injustice, but a very high price to be paid for a revolutionary change that would lead either to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine or the establishment of a new social order in post-war socialist Poland. In the political imagination, the war was not only about suffering but a break, a rupture in a profoundly unjust history, a struggle between two imperialisms that had brought suffering to the masses and the workers.

The Bund claimed that it would be the united workers of Europe who would win the war. Their victory, however, would spark another struggle – for an equal, fair, and socialist world.<sup>51</sup> The end of the war would also mean a time of dispensing justice, especially in relation to the Warsaw Jewish Council and Jewish Police, whose members had betrayed their own people.<sup>52</sup> A glimpse of a programme for the post-war period was outlined in a reply to a speech by Ignacy Szwarcbard, a Zionist and member the National Council of the Polish government-in-exile, and broadcast by the BBC in 1941. In the text published in September 1941, entitled “In Whose Name?”, the anonymous author denied Szwarcbard the right to represent the Jews, writing that Poland would rise again, not as an oppressor of the working class, but as a land of social equality. Poland, he continued, would not be a gift from heaven; it needed to be fought for against both internal and external enemies. In the end, the author stressed that the Jewish masses across all of occupied Poland, despite horrifying expulsions and constant persecution, were firm in the conviction that their future was tightly bound only here and only with this country.<sup>53</sup>

Tsukunft, a youth organisation associated with the Bund, also frequently maintained that liberation would only be complete with the triumph of socialist ideas. In an article entitled “The Jewish Question and National-Cultural Autonomy” published in *Tsayt Fragn* (Contemporary Questions) in November 1941, readers were assured of the rock-solid core of the Bund’s message. The author wrote that despite the war, the organisation had no intention of inventing any new solutions for the situation of Jews in Poland. He repeated the well-known slogan that for the Jewish working class, Poland was never a hotel, that the Jewish proletariat had never viewed itself as a temporary or redundant inhabitant. Therefore they did not need to seek a new home, because their home was called Poland – and in future the Free Polish Socialist Republic.<sup>54</sup>

Likewise, the Dror underground press did not postulate a grand transformation, even though the movement was aware of the enormous impact that the war, imprisonment, hunger, constant danger, and poverty had effected on the way the organisation functioned and influenced its members. Zuckerman held the position that as long as there was a ‘Jewish question’ and the social problems of society remained unsolved, the fundamental principles of the movement would remain sacred to every Hechaluts member, no matter what the conditions under which he or she lived.

50 Di welt milchome [The World War], in: Biuletyn 14/24 (20 December 1941), 2.

51 Ibid.

52 Call for justice is very often present in Bund’s underground press. See for example: Arbetlozikeyt, hunger un tifus in varshaver geto [Unemployment, Hunger and Typhus in the Warsaw Ghetto], in: Biuletyn 9/19 (20 August 1941), 9.

53 In wemens nomen? [In Whose Name?], in: Biuletyn 11/21 (10 September 1941), 12.

54 Di jidn frage un nacjonal-kulturele ojtonomie [The Jewish Question and Cultural-National Autonomy], in: *Tsayt Fragn* 2 (November 1941), 15-18.



However, due to the drastic change of circumstances, some of the Dror rules had to be explained in a new way that repudiated the depressing and discouraging ghetto reality.<sup>55</sup> Dror instructors had to discuss preparations for *aliya* (emigration to Palestine) or the need to teach Hebrew using new methods. In an article entitled “What Are We Preparing For?”, Yitzhak Zuckerman specifically focussed on the truth of the idea of the world to come. Only if the vision was honest and believed could instructors focus on their work, prepare the young, and conduct training.<sup>56</sup> According to Zuckerman, the worst-case scenario implied a repetition of the past, when Jews were given a chance to create a country but failed to do so due to a lack of qualified people. Unfortunately – Zuckerman warned – in the history of recent generations, the Jews had already encountered this tragic fate of a lack of strength in the nation to exploit certain historical circumstances.

### Colonisers of the Future

Political parties and youth organisations lacked control over the present, so they used the repertoire of pre-war ideals to exercise control over the future, to shape it, set the directions of its development, and liberate themselves not only from the past, but also from the present. Fulfilling the route described later by Barbara Adam, they rejected the religious principle that the future is the domain of God and sought to create a world that was suitable to them. The religious approach was harshly criticised, for example, in an article from early 1942 entitled “Isolation”, published in the journal of the Zionist Revisionists and supporters of the armed struggle for Palestine. The author, simplifying the traditional Jewish approach to history, criticised the visions of the world held by religious Jews, in which nations and their rulers do not decide for themselves, but exist only as instruments in the hands of God, who oppresses his chosen people. The author passionately stated that such an approach to history was offensive to Jews as it deprived the people of Israel of their agency.<sup>57</sup>

Another Zionist Revisionist article entitled “Notes for Tomorrow”, published in *Magen David* (Star of David) in February 1942, emphasised the need for self-determination. The author used Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophical concept of the ‘will to power’, understood as the desire to defeat all obstacles, and rejected the idea that the ‘Jewish will’ had become absent in the ghetto. On the contrary, even if the nation were enclosed tightly within walls as in a prison, where life was more like vegetation, Jews would not have lost their strength and would demand a tomorrow.<sup>58</sup>

The call for agency is visible in all Jewish underground press publications. The activists saw themselves as guarantors of the Jewish future. Understanding that the present meant only stagnation or even regression, they saw themselves as the heirs of Herzl, Marx, Borochoy, Jabotinsky, and the Paris Commune. They felt responsible for the fate of the nation, seeing themselves as teachers and guides of moral transformation, concerned especially with the situation of disadvantaged groups, which were to constitute the core of the Jewish nation. Of particular importance was the protection and education of young people, who were seen as the driving force of history. In the summer of 1940, in his article “Jewish Youth in the Present Moment”,

55 [Yitzhak Zuckerman] Tsadik, A jor noch der Iemberger barotung [A Year after the L’viv Meeting], in: Dror 5/9 (31 December 1940 – 27 February 1941), 15.

56 [Yitzhak Zuckerman] J. Fim, Cu wos mir grejtn zich, 5-6.

57 Izolacje [Isolation], in: Magen David (February 1942), 19.

58 Cum morgn (notich) [On Tomorrow (Notes)], in: Magen Dawid (February 1942), 14.

Tuvia Borzykowski of Dror stated that the time of the ghetto could be listed among the most tragic days in human history. The foundations of Jewish life had been destroyed and it was nearly impossible for the youth who came to live and breathe in such a period of transition to find a source of spiritual nourishment. Imprisonment in the ghetto was the reason for the spiritual crisis, degeneration, and anarchy.<sup>59</sup> Borzykowski called for the creation of conditions in which they would be able to prepare for their position in the avant-garde movement, in the role of pioneers, and ultimately to change the course of history; to take the place of a previous generation of fighters whom they had admired.

## Conclusions

In this paper, I examined the political visions of the future dreamed of in the Warsaw Ghetto. I also argued that references to historical and sociological theories created in a non-ghetto context can enrich our understanding of how Jewish activists perceived the past, present, and future. The discourse of the Jewish underground press clearly outlined the opposition between the present and the future. Yet, while waiting for that bright future, underground organisations did not delude themselves. The future seemed to be a difficult time, uncertain, even dangerous. Yet there was also a glimpse of hope that the end of the war must offer a new opening, a fresh start. The organisations did not change their programmes under ghetto conditions. They stuck to the basic directions that had been developed and shaped long before the war became a reference point in the Warsaw Ghetto, a sociopolitical adhesive that helped Jews to remain united and to face reality, to organise life and to find meaning in actions that were being undertaken.

Like the colonisers of the future described by Barbara Adam, the Jews of Warsaw wanted to take over the future and build a new world on the basis of knowledge and preparation. Despite all the dangers present in the ghetto, including death from hunger or disease, the deportations to labour camps, the despair over the loss of loved ones, the overwhelming fear and widespread apathy, the sense of social paralysis, and the inability to determine one's own fate, Jewish activists found the strength to overcome them. Yitzhak Zuckerman proclaimed that the Dror movement and Jews in general must use the time in the ghetto to shape the youth and spread Zionist ideals: "We are dedicated to action", urged Zuckerman in the fall of 1940. "They want to take away our human face, they want to break us spiritually, they want to sow fear among us." For Jewish activists in the Warsaw Ghetto, this seemed impossible. They constantly told themselves that no deed was too small and no task was unimportant in fulfilling the task of building the nation. "We are getting ready for tomorrow with all seriousness. To endure as long as possible this spinning wheel that draws us all into the abyss – this is our task for today."<sup>60</sup>

In March 1942, the Main Command of Ghetto, reflected on the changes that the last two and a half years had wrought on the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto. At this time, Polish Jewry was on the edge of destruction, as information regarding the Chełmno and Bełżec death camps had already reached the ghetto. What could be done when hundreds of thousands had already been killed and millions more were

59 [Tuvia Borzykowski] R. Domski, *Di jidisze jugnt in ictikn moment* [The Jewish Youth in the Present Moment], in: *Dror* 3 (June 1940), 11-12.

60 [Yitzhak Zuckerman] J. Fim, *Cu wos mir grejtn zich*, 8.

threatened with death? The authors admitted to their failure to provide an answer, yet they called everyone to look toward the future, as they believed a future was still possible.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Z problematyki ruchu w chwili obecnej, 5.

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